What's In The News?

OVERVIEW

In this media literacy activity, students use an "iceberg model" to analyze the global patterns and underlying structural causes that drive events in the news.

INQUIRY/CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- What are the economic, political, and social forces that drive the dramatic events we see reported in the news?
- How are news events connected to each other in terms of their underlying causes?
- What are some positive ways we can address the structural causes of many negative world events?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:
- Analyze several news articles using a model that helps identify the particular global patterns and economic, political, and social forces (i.e. structural causes) behind the story.
- Diagram the events, patterns, and underlying structures in a news article
- Identify connections among news articles
- Discuss structural solutions to address these events
- Write an article about the emerging patterns and underlying causes of a particular current event

TIME REQUIRED: 1–2 hours

KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- **Newsworthy events, global patterns, and economic, political, and social structures**
- **Media literacy**

SUBJECT AREAS

- **Social Studies**
  (Geography, World History, World Cultures, U.S. History, Civics/Government, Economics, Global Studies, Contemporary World Problems)
- **Science** (Environmental)
- **Language Arts**
- **Journalism**

NATIONAL STANDARDS CONSISTENCY

- **NCSS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9**
- **NSES: A, C, F**

GRADE LEVEL: 9–12

FTF Related Reading

- Intermediate: Chapter 9 from *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions*
- Advanced: Unit 1, Chapter 3 and Unit 5, Chapter 4 from *It's All Connected*

Materials/Preparation

- 1 sample news article to model the activity
- Overhead: *Iceberg Model*

- A variety of news articles, 2 or 3 per group. Gather articles from the newspaper, magazines, and/or the Internet about significant events in the world (you can gather the articles yourself and/or have students bring in articles).
- Butcher paper, 1 sheet per group
- Marking pens, colored, 3–4 pens per group

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Activity

Introduction

1. Ask the students to define media literacy (the ability to read, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of media forms such as television, print, radio, computers, etc.).

2. Tell them that they are going to explore an aspect of media literacy by analyzing some news articles using a tool called the "Iceberg Model".

Steps

1. Share with the class your sample news article about an important current event, such as a significant conflict, an environmental disaster, an economic situation, or a criminal activity.

2. Ask students to paraphrase the event depicted in the sample article.

3. Use the overhead, *Iceberg Model*, to lead a class discussion about the relationship between current events and the global patterns and underlying economic, political, and social forces that propel them to prominence in the news. Explain that what we read about most often in the news are **events**—the newsworthy, exciting, and dramatic things that happen in our world. ***Events*** in the news are like the tip of an iceberg. The visible part of an iceberg is only about 10 percent of its total mass and the remaining 90 percent is underwater and never seen. However, it is this hidden 90 percent that the ocean currents act on and which determine the behavior of the iceberg's tip. Likewise, news events "at the tip of the iceberg" may be things such as war in the Middle East, crime in our community, or a massive flood in China. On the news, these events are witnessed as dramatic isolated incidents—the forces that create and shape them (what happens "underwater") are not often revealed.

When we notice the occurrence of similar events (wars or terrorist attacks in other parts of the world, or other extreme natural disasters such as earthquakes or a tsunami), we are seeing the emergence of a ***pattern***. It may appear that more of these events are happening, or it may be that the media is reporting these events more often. For example, we might read a news article in the paper today about a local robbery (an event). Over the course of a year we may notice that there are several articles about robberies and other crimes committed in

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the same area of town (a pattern). Does this indicate that crime is up or just that we are hearing about it more frequently? Patterns underlie and act upon events, so they are shown just below the tip in the iceberg model.

Finally, deep beneath the surface are the **underlying structures** or **root causes** that drive the events and patterns—just as the underlying ice mass drives the tip of the iceberg. These underlying structures or causes can be economic, political, or social. For example, the underlying cause of the robberies and other crimes may have to do with the economics of the area. Perhaps schools in that area are unable to offer quality education or unemployment may be high. Underlying structural causes may be the growing gap between the rich and poor, or a lack of education, job opportunities, or other forces that preclude sustainable livelihoods. Are underlying structural causes such as these typically revealed in news stories? If not, what effect does this have on how we understand an event and how we perceive the people who are involved in the event?

4. Go back to the sample news article, and together with the students use the iceberg model to analyze it. Ask them, "Has this type of event been in the news before? Is it a recurring event? If so, can you identify a global pattern that is driving these events? What are some possible root causes of these patterns? For example, is the event related to poverty, lack of education and/or health care, or development practices that

are not environmentally sound? Does the article discuss some or all of these root causes?" If you use an article about a war in Africa, you might look for a discussion in the article about Africa's colonial past, arbitrary boundaries, population growth, the AIDS epidemic, environmental destruction, and poverty.

5. Before moving on, be sure students understand how to use the iceberg model to analyze a news article in terms of the events, emerging patterns, and underlying causes.

6. Arrange the class into groups of 3-4 students and give each group 2-3 different news articles, 1 sheet of butcher paper, and 1 set of pens.

7. In their groups, have the students read the articles, choose 1, and use the iceberg model to analyze the event and look for patterns and root causes. Have students discuss whether they have noticed other similar events in the news. Then have them brainstorm, discuss, and list on a separate piece of paper all of the root causes they can think of that might contribute to the event.

8. Have each group create an iceberg diagram of their news article by gluing or taping the article onto the top of the paper, listing and/or drawing the patterns they have noticed, and finally listing and/or drawing the underlying root causes. Their final diagram should have a shape similar to an iceberg with the news article at the top (the event), the pattern below, and the underlying causes at the bottom.

9. Have each group present their iceberg models to the class. Discuss how many

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of the events presented connect to each other through similar underlying causes. For example, wars, social unrest, and environmental damage are often closely linked by factors such as poverty, lack of education, and limited resources.

10. Have each group discuss structural solutions that could be implemented to address the root causes of events and patterns identified in their articles.

11. Conclude with the following reflection questions.

Assessment
Reflection Questions

For Intermediate and Advanced Students

• How did using the iceberg model to analyze the news articles help in your understanding of events, patterns, root causes, and their connections?

• How does the iceberg model fall short as an analysis tool? In other words, are there news stories and/or events that would not fit this model?

• What was the most surprising thing you found in your analysis?

• How could you use the iceberg model to improve your reading skills (reading for content versus understanding)?

• What can we do to address the underlying structural problems of the events and patterns you studied?

Lesson Extension

• The Iceberg Model is based on a "systems thinking" approach to problem solving, which looks at issues from a holistic, dynamic, interconnected, systemic perspective. Have students research systems thinking. A good place for links to system thinking resources

and information is Pegasus Communications at **www.pegasuscom.com**.

Writing/Technology Connection

• As a class or individually, students can do a media research project. There are several good media literacy sites on the web. Visit the *Independent Media Center* website at **www.indymedia.org** or the *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* website at **www.fair.org**.

Action Projects

• Have each group rewrite their article explaining the event, but also including the patterns and underlying structures. Students can publish their articles in the school paper or submit them to the news source that published the original article.

• Visit **www.facingthefuture.org** and click on **Take Action**, then **Fast Facts Quick Actions** for more information and action opportunities about global issues.

Additional Resources
Websites

• **www.indymedia.org** – The Independent Media Center is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate telling of the truth.

• **www.fair.org** – Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting is a national media watch group working to invigorate the First Amendment by advocating for greater diversity in the press and by scrutinizing media practices that marginalize public interest, minority, and dissenting viewpoints.

Lesson 23 Overhead:

ICEBERG MODEL

"WATERLINE"   EVENTS

PATTERNS

STRUCTURES